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STATE FOR EUR/RPM, EUR/SCE, PM
OSD FOR USDP -- WINTERNITZ AND GRAFF
NSC FOR AINSLEY
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2016
TAGS: [NATO PREL MOPS MARR HR](#)
SUBJECT: NATO ALLIES ENCOURAGE CROATIA IN MEMBERSHIP DRIVE,
WORRY ABOUT LOW PUBLIC SUPPORT

REF: SECSTATE 169370

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Richard Olson for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY. On October 13, Croatia presented its Annual National Plan (ANP) outlining its reform goals for the coming year. The Croatian delegation expressed its hope that Croatia would receive an encouraging message on its membership prospects out of the November NATO Summit and a membership invitation in 2008. Many Allies expressed support for Zagreb's aspirations for NATO membership, but expressed concern about the low level of public support for NATO. Allies urged Croatia to implement the communications plan included in its ANP to educate Croatians about NATO and increase public support. Allies also asked about the slow pace of refugee returns and questioned Croatia's decision to acquire fighter aircraft. The U.S. praised Croatia's increasing contributions to international peacekeeping as well as its efforts to advance political, economic, rule-of-law and defense reforms, which it said must be accompanied by stronger popular support for NATO. END SUMMARY.

CROATIA HIGHLIGHTS REFORM PROGRESS, AFGHANISTAN CONTRIBUTION

2. (C) In an October 13 meeting with NATO's Senior Political Committee, Croatia presented its 2006-2007 ANP outlining Croatia's reform goals for the upcoming year under NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP). Assistant Foreign Minister Pjer Simunovic said Croatia had made considerable progress in all areas of its reform program during the previous year as part of both its EU and NATO membership campaigns.

3. (C) Simunovic highlighted Croatia's contributions to NATO operations and stated that Croatia had made a long-term commitment to ISAF in Afghanistan. He noted that Croatia had tripled its ISAF contribution from 50 to 150 soldiers and placed no caveats on where they could be deployed. Croatia was considering offering to serve as a lead country in a PRT. Croatia was also examining how it could provide security assistance to Iraq and would be making an offer to NATO in this regard.

LOOKING FOR A MEMBERSHIP TIMELINE

4. (C) Simunovic said Croatia felt it deserved a strong and encouraging message about its membership prospects from the November NATO Summit in Latvia and thought it was realistic that Croatia receive an invitation in 2008. He noted that public support for EU membership doubled "overnight" once the EU signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with Croatia and he expected a similar effect if NATO would indicate a timeline for Croatia to join the Alliance.

5. (C) Croatian Ambassador to NATO Bozinovic added that the Riga communique would be important for Croatian public attitudes toward NATO. He said there had been negative reaction in the Croatian media when Croatia was not invited to the September 28-29 NATO Defense Ministerial in Slovenia where Afghanistan was discussed, even though Croatian soldiers are serving in Kandahar. He anticipated a similarly negative reaction if Croatian officials were not invited to the Summit in Latvia. While acknowledging that the Croatian government had to address the low public opinion of NATO, the Alliance's support was also needed in the form of a [cleQR>QR](#) which was the first military planning document with a 10-year timeline for defense reforms. Pokaz noted that the LTDP, which had been approved by Parliament, now needed to be implemented. Allies commended Croatia's LTDP with The

Netherlands stressing that execution would be challenging. Pokaz stated the LTDP used a realistic approach and is designed to prevent the Croatian Armed Forces from becoming overextended. The LTDP included contingency plans and prioritized projects, which allowed the plan to be adjusted if budget targets are not met. Pokaz frankly stated that it would be a continuous struggle to win full funding every year for the LTDP.

110. (C) France, Germany, Romania, Germany, Czech Republic, and the US commented on Croatia's plans to identify a new multi-purpose combat aircraft as a replacement for its existing MIG-21 aircraft. The U.S., UK, and The Netherlands questioned whether the purchase was a wise use of scarce defense funds while France said they were aware Croatia would need to keep an Air Force to police its skies. Pokaz noted that Croatia intended to acquire fighter assets to perform an Air Policing mission since their MIG-21s would be de-commissioned by 2011. The MOD, he said, would make a decision on the type and number of aircraft in 2007.

111. (C) As a next step in the ANP process, NATO International Staff will visit Croatia in February to begin their assessment of progress implementing this year's ANP.
NULAND

Allies. Both Hungary and Germany thanked the delegation for the Croatian Armed Force's (CAF) participation in both of their respective PRTs in Afghanistan. Slovenia stated that Croatia had now become a security provider in its own right.

QUESTIONS RAISED ABOUT PUBLIC SUPPORT, RETURNS

17. (C) Simunovic noted that this year's ANP included a Communications Management Strategy for Croatia's Accession to NATO, which called for an analytical study of public attitudes toward NATO followed by an action plan for creating long-term, sustainable support for NATO among Croatians. Many Allies praised Croatia for its communications strategy, but stressed that it must be implemented. The U.S. and UK emphasized the need for senior officials to engage in the public information campaign about NATO, and the Croatian delegation gave assurances that senior leadership would be involved. Germany stressed the need to tailor public information message to specific target groups. Asked about the main messages of the campaign, Simunovic said it would stress that NATO membership is about joining a community of values that Croatia shares, providing security to prevent Croatia's territorial integrity from being threatened again, and integrating with the most advanced economies of the West.

18. (C) Italy, U.S., UK, and The Netherlands raised concerns about refugee returns and Simunovic said Croatia expected to meet the goals in the Sarajevo Declaration for returns by the end of the year. Slovenia stressed the need for Croatia to respect international agreements and criticized the renaming of disputed areas with Croatian names (a reference to their border disputes).

DEFENSE PLAN PRAISED, FIGHTERS QUESTIONED

19. (C) Assistant Defense Minister Igor Pokaz described Croatia's Long Term Development Plan (LTDP) for its Armed Forces, which was the first military planning document with a 10-year timeline for defense reforms. Pokaz noted that the LTDP, which had been approved by Parliament, now needed to be implemented. Allies commended Croatia's LTDP with The Netherlands stressing that execution would be challenging. Pokaz stated the LTDP used a realistic approach and is designed to prevent the Croatian Armed Forces from becoming overextended. The LTDP included contingency plans and prioritized projects, which allowed the plan to be adjusted if budget targets are not met. Pokaz frankly stated that it would be a continuous struggle to win full funding every year for the LTDP.

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